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NEWSLETTER • Office of Patient-Centered Care and Cultural Transformation

Gulf Coast Veterans
Health Care System

Newsletter August 2014

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It Takes A Village To Provide Patient Centered Care

From the day the Gulf Coast Blind Rehabilitation Center's doors opened at the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System in Biloxi, collaboration between services has been a way of life. When Veterans with visual impairments come into our rehabilitation program, we make every attempt to look at each one in a holistic manner. We understand that in order for them to get the most out of their program, we need to be meeting their needs mentally, physically, medically, socially, and so on.

A great example of this team spirit has been our work with the Audiology Department. Dr. Peak, the Chief of Audiology, told us from the beginning that any time we suspected a Veteran of having any hearing difficulties we could contact her department. We do that regularly! One day one of our Blind Rehabilitation Specialists inquired about hearing aids that would be Bluetooth compatible with the iPhones and iPads that Veterans learn to use over in Blind Rehabilitation as personal assistive devices. Many people do not realize that the iPhone and iPad are fully accessible through features such as screen enlargement, Voiceover and Siri to individuals who are visually impaired and totally blind. Audiology said that they did, in fact, have Bluetooth compatible hearing aids. Our first Veteran who was issued one was so excited about how well his Bluetooth hearing aids worked for him that he literally cried every time he talked about the life changing effect they had...for accessing his iPad in training, for hearing the television, for carrying on conversations.

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation sees our Veterans for a variety of reasons. We refer Veterans over for KT when they need to develop exercise routines for building endurance for their long white cane training or



Debra L. Gilley M.Ed., COMS, CLVT
Interim Chief, Gulf Coast Blind
Rehabilitation Center

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get rollators for stability when walking. Occupational Therapy is essential if a Veteran has some neurological difficulties such as tremors that make typing difficult during computer training. And we must not forget the full time Recreation Therapist assigned to us who encourages our Veterans every day to get out and have fun and be active.

Another great collaboration occurred with Behavioral Health. We had a Veteran who was agitated much of the time, talked about the frustrations in his marriage, had difficulty concentrating in his classes, suffered from high blood pressure and was hard for the other Veterans to be around. The psychologist assigned to us began meeting with him and recognized the signs of PTSD. Through building a relationship with this Veteran day in and day out, we were able to encourage him to get help for his PTSD and he graduated from

our program and moved straight into their program. When he came back to us for advanced training a year later, he was a changed man...calm, happy, able to focus and with a repaired marriage. Now he and his wife drop

in from time to time as they go through town just to say hello.

We do great things here in Blind Rehabilitation. We are all about returning Veterans back to a life that is as independent as possible in spite of their vision loss. Yet, we also realize that even though we are in a building almost all by ourselves we are not an island cut off from everyone. So here is our shout out to:

Prosthetics, Nursing, Optometry, MAS, Occupational Therapy, Kinesiotherapy, Physical Therapy, Rec Therapy, Social Work, Audiology, Dental Clinic, Behavioral Health, Pharmacy, Nutrition, Housekeeping, Transportation, Volunteer Services, DVA, Chaplains, Maintenance, Engineering, and all the other services I may have forgotten as I typed this out. We rely on the "village" to help us accomplish greatness. Thank you for supporting Blind Rehabilitation!

Hot Diggity Dog Ambassadors!!

By Danny Duke, Technical Career Field Intern

Ambassadors celebrated their First Anniversary on Thursday, July 17, 2014 by serving turkey hotdogs with all the fixings to the Veterans and their families in the Biloxi Primary & Specialty Clinics. The Ambassador Program started in Biloxi on July 2, 2013 with only a handful of Ambassadors. Since then we have grown to over 85 active Ambassadors in all five locations. Over 25,000 Veterans and family members have been served by dedicated and committed Ambassadors. But get this. There has been one and a half million steps taken! Ambassadors use pedometers to track their steps while serving. We call it "Steps to Achieving Cultural Transformation." That roughly translates to 750 miles that Ambassadors have collectively walked. Now that means we can walk from here to Memphis, Tennessee and back — serving Veterans the whole time. There would be a Veteran in need of assistance every 160 feet. These Ambassadors are an amazing group of people!



Biloxi Ambassadors were recognized for their service by Mr. Dawson at the Director's Staff Meeting on July 10, 2014 .

One of the main reasons we have Ambassadors is to give the Veterans a great experience when they first walk through the doors and they think, "Man, where am I going?" The Ambassadors are trained to zone in on these Veterans and provide immediate assistance.

The Veterans appreciate having Ambassadors meet and greet them with a warm handshake and friendly smile!



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Lost Vision Leads to Found Insight

By: Terry Rozum, LICSW

In October of 2012, Medgar Law was suicidal and hospitalized. As he says, “I lost my vision, lost my job, lost my money. I felt like my family was better off with my life insurance than they were with me around.” Retinal neuropathy from his diabetes along with scar tissue from his boxing days rendered him legally blind. He goes on to say, “The loss of my vision put me in a shut-down mode. I couldn’t imagine only being able to listen and not see. I was even mad at God.”

Mr. Law, an electrician by trade, made a transition to Chlorine Operator at Olin Chemical near McIntosh, AL, proudly earning \$31/hour. He put in twelve hour days and as much overtime as he wanted. He took his job seriously knowing that a chemical spill could kill people in the vicinity of the plant. His co-workers were like family; he enjoyed his work and their company. The Army Reserve and National Guard were also his family for a total of 29 years. He served in Iraq but upon return, his eyesight was so poor he was unable to be redeployed. In a very short time, Mr. Law had lost the life he knew and loved.

When I met Mr. Law, the first thing he said to me was, “I just want to be able to read my Bible again.” His faith was important to him but now he was struggling to maintain it after so many losses. He struggled at the idea of being dependent after being the bread winner in the family. Mr. Law felt he was a burden by being helpless. He repeatedly said that his independence was important to him and who he is.

We addressed his reading first but with a twist. I introduced him to audio books. He found the Bible on disc at the library and began to listen. He especially enjoyed one of the books I suggested, *The Shack* by Wm. Paul Young, a story of forgiveness. He frequented the library for more audio books as he found them preferable to listening to the TV and asking others constant questions about what was going on since he could not see the screen. He began to listen to Joel Osteen’s audio books to enhance his spiritual health. Mr. Law was feeling less of a burden and more independent but still isolated.

During this time, the then VIST Coordinator (Visual Impairment Services Team) at Gulf Coast VA, Lucille Pace, LMSW, began to work with Mr. Law. She had him evaluated for the Blind Rehab Center (BRC) residential program. She also assisted in getting computer equipment for his home that would enlarge print so he could read again. The BRC staff gave Mr. Law a magnifier—his eyes as he calls it—that immediately empowered him to read his Bible again. He was eventually given a megaview, a binocular-type enhancement that assists with seeing at a distance which allowed him to see his son graduate from high school. The BRC accepted him into the residential program in

September 2013 where his life really took a turn.

Mr. Law describes feeling uneasy at the BRC because he was the youngest resident until someone younger and totally blind entered the program. Mr. Law shared his experience with the younger Veteran and was able to assist him in navigating the program and to the realization that his life was not over just because he was blind. This mentorship made him feel useful and uplifted. He says he stopped seeing his lack of vision as a disability and more of a challenge. He learned household skills and everyday living skills that he continues to use and master. He learned how to effectively use his white cane to further his independence.

Today, Medgar Law gardens, plays with his grandchildren, reads, helps with the household chores, walks his two dogs, and feels nearly as independent as he did before he lost his vision. He bristles when someone tries to do things for him. He says he often asks others to allow him to fall so he can prove to himself that he can still get up, metaphorically. He admits that he still has bad days but knows he has the faith, strength, and support he needs to lead a fulfilling life he thought was gone.



Medgar Law, Retired U.S. Army Veteran

Statement of Purpose: To provide a forum for employees and volunteers to communicate ongoing progress with patient-centered care/cultural transformation (PCC/CT) within the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System ((GCVHCS); to foster a climate that reflects the health care system’s creativity and diversity.

Nationally Recognized Award Winners

By: Mary Marlowe,
Public Affairs Intern



Dr. Jefferson O. Rogers, Psy.D receiving the **William A. Nelson Award for Excellence in Health care Ethics**.

and has been in charge of the Ethics Consultation service at our facility since 2000. He never imagined he would become an ethicist until Dr. Gus Sison asked him to work with ethics consultation 14 years ago. Dr. Rogers says, "Serving Veterans is an honor and having the opportunity to help Veterans, their family members, and their health care providers navigate through some of life's most challenging moments is tremendously rewarding. I'm still shocked to have been chosen for the William A. Nelson award and will try hard to live up to this great honor!"

***** FULL AND CLOSED TO REGISTRATION*****

Whole Health Course—Change the Conversation
Help Veterans maximize their health & well-being

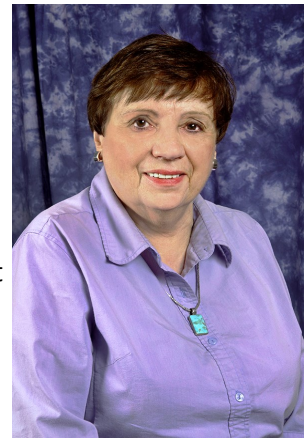
August 26-28, 2014



The Inspire! e-newsletter is posted monthly on the GCVHCS home Web page and distributed in the clinics. If you have an inspiring patient-centered story.

Dr. Rogers has been with the VA since 1991, when he was a Psychology doctoral intern at the Washington, DC VAMC. Dr. Rogers was a Geropsychology Postdoctoral Fellow at the Little Rock VAMC in 1992-1993, then on staff in Little Rock in 1993-1994. After some time working in the private sector, Dr. Rogers came to the Gulf Coast Veterans HCS in 1995. He started working with ethics consultation in 1997

Dr. Margaret Peak, Chief of Audiology/Speech and Language Pathology has been with the VA since 1975 where she began as a staff audiologist at the St. Louis Veterans Administration Hospital. Dr. Peak transferred to GCVHCS in 1990 where she has become the backbone of the Audiology Service. Dr. Peak has been elected as a Fellow of the American Speech-Language - Hearing Association (ASHA). Fellowship is one of the highest forms of recognition given by ASHA of an individual's accomplishments and her outstanding professional achievements. Dr. Peak will be formally recognized at the ASHA awards ceremony in November this year at the ASHA convention in Orlando, Florida. Dr. Peak's colleagues all felt she was a wise administrator, strong leader, gifted mentor, and highly trained clinician who has shared herself with others for many years.



Dr. Margaret Peak, Chief of Audiology/Speech and Language Pathology was recently elected as a **Fellow** by the **American Speech Language Hearing Association**.

*****Employees Only *****

Please Register in TMS at the links below:

[Patient Centered Care Retreat - August 12, 2014](#)

[Patient Centered Care Retreat - August 20, 2014](#)

Retreat from your daily work activity and refocus on the vision, mission and goals of VA with a day of growing and connecting. Give us the chance to reinvigorate your attitude while learning the VA's new direction in proactive, personalized, patient centered care.